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H., W.

A letter to...Right Hon.

Nich.Vansittart...

Liverpool

1816

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A letter to the Right Hon. Nich. Vansittart,  
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Signed: W. H.

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**LETTER**

TO THE

**RT. HON. NICH. VANSITTART,**

ON THE

**REPEAL OF THE DUTY ON SALT.**

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A  
**LETTER**

TO THE

**RIGHT HON. NICH. VANSITTART,**  
CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER, &c. &c. &c.

ON THE

**Benefits which would result to the Poor,**

And the advantages which would accrue to the  
AGRICULTURE, THE FISHERIES, THE MANUFACTURES,  
AND THE COMMERCE,  
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM,

FROM A

**REPEAL OF THE DUTY ON SALT.**

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"Whenever the return of Peace enables his Majesty's Ministers  
"to venture on a diminution of the Revenue, the Repeal of the Duty  
"on Salt shall have their first consideration."—Mr PITT.

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LIVERPOOL:

PRINTED BY WRIGHT AND CRUICKSHANK, CASTLE-STREET:  
AND SOLD BY THEM AND LONGMAN, HURST, REES, ORME AND BROWN,  
LONDON.

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V. 4

Ms. B. 1. 9. 2. 3. 4. 5.

TO THE

*Right Hon. Nicholas Vansittart,*

CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER, &c. &c. &c.

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SIR,

I CONCEIVE it to be the duty of every Englishman, at a crisis like the present, to offer his best advice, if he think that it can in any way be instrumental, either in mitigating the pressure of those evils which are the necessary consequence of a protracted and expensive War, or in furthering those benefits which the Country naturally expects to reap from the conclusion of Peace.

Under this impression, I presume to address myself to you, Sir; and I feel confident that rational and temperate suggestions on public affairs, will receive from you all the consideration which they deserve. You may be startled, Sir, when I at once avow that my present application is for a reduction of Taxes—for a total repeal of the Duty on Salt!

That the determination of his Royal Highness the Prince Regent, to economise in every department of Government, aided by the powerful assistance which a Peace Establishment brings in its train, will at an early day enable his Majesty's Ministers to dispense with a large proportion of the present revenue, is, I think, highly probable, and what the Country most anxiously looks forward to. It therefore becomes an object of serious consideration, in what manner the *oppression of our present taxation* can be most essentially relieved by the *contemplated reduction of our expenditure*.

It is on this ground alone, that I presume to draw your attention to the high national importance attendant on the Repeal of the Duty on Salt. I have considered the subject attentively, and will proceed to state the numerous and weighty bene-

fits which the Country would reap from the adoption of such a measure.

The distressed state of the labouring classes, imperatively calls for effective and permanent relief; and I know not any concession so important and so grateful, which a Minister could make to their wants, as a removal of the Duty on Salt.—The boon which was lately offered to them in the Repeal of the War Malt Tax, afforded no relief to hundreds of thousands of the labouring poor, whose poverty compels them to substitute either water, or whey, or buttermilk, or weak cider, in lieu of so expensive a beverage as ale. But with Salt no poor man can dispense; it is an essential article of his food; it is a necessary ingredient in all his meals; and to such an extent is this the case, that upon a moderate calculation it cannot be estimated at *less than 3 per cent. on his income*. The high price at which he receives this necessary article, also operates most injuriously to his interests, by preventing him from laying up his store of salted provisions for the consumption of the winter, which is so necessary a piece of his domestic economy, and so essential to his comforts. Surely, Sir, no revenue derived from this source, however great, can be any adequate compensation for a tax so oppressive, and which

deprives a poor man of so large a proportion of his hard-earned wages.

I will next consider the subject as it respects the benefits which would accrue to the Agricultural interests of the Country; and I think upon examination it will be found, that there is scarcely any other measure which could be adopted, that would be attended with equal advantages. To the Agriculturist it is, indeed, the most valuable boon which a Government could bestow.

And in this opinion we shall be confirmed, when we consider its excellence and economy\* as a Manure;† in fattening Cattle; in the preservation of Hay; in the curing of Cheese and Butter;

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\* A Bushel of Salt, weighing 56 lbs. may be obtained at the Works for sixpence; and for sixpence in addition, or less, it may be conveyed to any Port in the United Kingdom. But when we consider that 3000 per cent. is levied on the first cost, it ceases to be a matter of surprise, that it has hitherto been so sparingly resorted to by Agriculturists.

† Dr. Darwin, in treating of Salt as a Manure, observes,—  
 "That as it is a stimulus which excites the vegetable absorbent  
 "vessels into greater action than usual, it may, in a certain  
 "quantity, increase their growth, by taking up more nourishment in a given time, and performing their circulations and  
 "secretions with greater energy."

and other important uses, connected with the Agriculture of the Country.

Notwithstanding the excessive duty, numerous experiments have been made, and almost invariably with uniform success.—An interesting detail from the Rev. E. Cartwright, will be found in the 4th vol. of Communications to the Board of Agriculture, which is conclusive as to the application of Salt as a manure for Potatoes.\* And in Dr. Holland's Agricultural Survey of the County of Chester, are clearly shown the good effects resulting from its use on Grass Lands, and as a manure for Wheat and Barley.† In the 27th vol. of the

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\* It appears from this communication, that "the experiment  
 "could not have been tried on a soil better adapted to give im-  
 "partial results. Of ten different manures which were resorted  
 "to, most of them of known and acknowledged efficacy, one only  
 "excepted, Salt was superior to them all. Its effects when  
 "combined with soot were extraordinary; yielding in a row 240  
 "Potatoes, whilst 150 only were produced from the row manured  
 "with lime. It was observable, also, where Salt was applied,  
 "whether by itself or in combination, the roots were free from  
 "that scabbiness which often infects Potatoes, and from which  
 "none of the other beds (and there were in the field near forty  
 "more than made part of the experiments) were altogether  
 "exempt."

† "After draining a piece of sour rushy ground about the  
 "middle of October, some refuse Salt was spread upon a part of

Annals of Agriculture, there is a communication from Davies Giddy, Esq. of some interesting experiments on the use of Salt in the culture of Turnips; by which it appears, that on a part of a field, which had been previously exhausted, half a crop of Turnips was produced; but the crop totally failed in that part of the field where the or-

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" the land, after the rate of 8 bushels to the acre, and in another part 16 bushels. In a short time the vegetation disappeared totally, and during the month of April following, not a blade of grass was to be seen. In the latter end of the month of May, a most flourishing crop of rich grass made its appearance on that part where the 8 bushels had been laid. In the month of July, the other portion produced a still stronger crop; the Cattle were remarkably fond of it, and during the whole ensuing winter (which is 10 or 12 years since) and to this day, the land retained, and yet exhibits, a superior verdure to the neighbouring closes."

" A Gentleman lately carried a small quantity of conch grass roots and other rubbish, harrowed off his land, to the Salt Works, and laid it for some time upon the ground where the foul Salt is destroyed; he then carried it back, and mixed it with manure. His Barley and his Hay-grass were strong, from this composition, beyond his most sanguine expectations."

" Its effects on fallow lands are equally advantageous:—by sowing it at the time of breaking up the lands for a fallow, its strong saline quality destroys vegetation, and every noxious insect; but by being mixed sufficiently with the soil, before the Wheat is sown, it adds a strong nutriment, and ensures the best of crops."—*Survey of Cheshire.*

dinary manure was laid without Salt. In another instance, three acres of land, which on the preceding year had borne a crop of Wheat, not exceeding 12 bushels on an acre, were ploughed before Christmas, and brought into fine tilth by the Midsummer following. On each acre were sown 20 bushels of Salt, excepting that two ridges towards the middle of the field were purposely left without it: on these two ridges the Turnips totally failed, but the remainder of the field produced a plentiful crop. It is farther instanced, that four acres of land, completely worn out by successive tillage, were ploughed before Christmas; three acres were sown with Salt, at the rate of 25 bushels, and the remaining acre with 18 bushels, without any other manure: the crop was in general a good one, but was visibly the best where the greatest quantity of Salt had been used. Crops of Turnips were subsequently raised with equal success; and in the severe winter of 1794-5, it was much less injured by the frost than others similarly treated, and cultivated in the common way.

Numerous other instances might be adduced of the advantages attending the use of Salt as a manure; the few which have been stated will suffice for the object in view. I will now advert to the benefits resulting from its use in fattening Cattle;



in which my statements will be corroborated by the opinions and experiments of men eminent in science and agriculture.\* Dr. Anderson says; there is no substance yet known which is so much relished by the whole order of graminivorous animals, as common Salt. The wild creatures of the desert are so fond of it, that wherever they discover a bank of earth impregnated with a small proportion of Salt, they come to it regularly ever after to lick the saline earth. It is also admitted by all those who have tried the experiment, that Salt, given along with the food of domestic animals (except fowls), tends very much to promote their health, and accelerate their fattening; and although some persons, who have been at a loss to account

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\* Mr Parkes, the Chemist, states, that "Cattle are so fond of Salt, that they will even devour large quantities of marl, if mixed with it. In America, it is a common practice to sprinkle Salt in layers upon Hay, when making it into hay-ricks; and it is found to assist in preserving the Hay, and to render the Cattle healthy." This observation is contained in a Report to a Committee of the House of Commons, who employed Mr P. to investigate the subject of rendering Sugar unfit for common use, without destroying its nutritious properties, and with a view, in such case, of permitting its use in feeding Cattle, free of duty. Salt would equally serve the purposes of the Farmer; and both articles being freed from impost, it could be rendered at near  $\frac{7}{10}$ th part the price of Sugar!!!

for the manner in which this stimulant could act as a nutritious substance, have affected to disregard the fact, yet no one has been able to bring the slightest show of evidence to invalidate the strong proofs which have been adduced in support of it; though unfortunately for the Country, few experiments have been tried. It is not, therefore, an extraordinary position to say, that by a proper use of common Salt, the same quantity of forage might, on many occasions, be made to go *twice as far* as it could have done in feeding animals, had the Salt been withheld from them. If so, then we have here laid open to our view an easy mode of augmenting the produce of our fields to an amazing extent; for if the same quantity of forage can be made to go, not twice as far, but  $\frac{1}{10}$ th part only further than it now does, it would be the same thing as adding  $\frac{1}{10}$ th part to the aggregate produce of meat for beasts throughout the whole kingdom.

In the 24th vol. of the Annals of Agriculture, there is a communication to Arthur Young, Esq. which is at once so interesting and satisfactory, that I have been induced to transcribe the whole. Mr Young's correspondent says—"In looking over the first volume of the Memoirs of the Royal Academy of Sciences at Paris, I met with a paper, entitled 'Physical Observations on the

“Effect of Salt in fattening Cattle.” The title excited my curiosity, and on reading the memoir, the author’s reasoning appeared to me not only plausible, but convincing. His views are certainly enlarged, and directed to objects of the most important kind, viz. the improvement of Land and the increase of Cattle. Helays it down as an axiom, or self-evident truth, that by increasing cattle, land may be improved; and by improving land, cattle may be multiplied.

“The Farmer, he says, who has more than an ordinary stock of working Cattle, reaps a double advantage; the one by having his work done in season, the other by enriching a greater proportion of his land by means of their additional manure.—The only difficulty is, how to maintain an increased number without increasing the expence: this, he asserts, may be done by the use of Salt, and advances the three following propositions:—

“1. That Salt given with the food of Cattle, augments the nourishment of that food.—  
 “2. That in proportion to the quantity of Salt eaten by Cattle, the effects of that augmentation will be perceivable.—3. That no ill consequence will follow from excess of Salt eaten by Cattle, even though it should be given them

“without stint. These propositions he endeavours to support by unquestionable facts.

“In the jurisdiction of Arles, in the County of Provence, there is, he says, a district called the Crau, extending in length about six leagues, and breadth about three, the whole surface of which is covered with small rough stones, and not a tree or bush is to be seen in the whole district, except here and there upon the borders; yet on this spot so seemingly sterile, by the free use of Salt, more numerous flocks of Sheep are bred and reared than upon any other common of equal extent throughout the whole kingdom; and what is not less remarkable, the Sheep are healthier, hardier, and endure the severity of the winter with less loss, though they have fewer sheep-cots for covering, than those fed and bred on more copious pastures, and that have besides the advantage of more convenient shelter. Add to this, that the wool of the flocks, bred and brought up in the Crau, is not only the finest in the whole Country, but bears the highest price of any in France. From hence he concludes, that it is to the unlimited use of Salt that these surprising effects are to be ascribed; for it frequently happens that the Crau is so burnt up in the summer, that the poor animals are forced to turn

“ up the very stones to come at the few blades of  
 “ grass that grow round them, and yet none perish  
 “ for want of food. Let every excellence, there-  
 “ fore, that can reasonably be supposed inherent  
 “ in the herbage be allowed to it, yet the quantity  
 “ of it is so small, that without the abundant use  
 “ of Salt, a *fourth part* of the Sheep kept in the  
 “ Crau could not subsist on it.

“ But as a still further demonstration that this  
 “ astonishing effect is solely to be attributed to  
 “ Salt, we have, says the writer, in Languedoc, on  
 “ the borders of the Rhone, a spot of the same  
 “ kind of stony land, in every respect similar to  
 “ that of the Crau, though in other respects it is  
 “ no ways inferior; the wines and other fruits  
 “ produced on the borders of both, being in their  
 “ goodness and other essential qualities equal.

“ Having proved his first proposition incontro-  
 “ vertibly, he proceeds to prove the second, to  
 “ recommend an easy experiment, which it is in  
 “ every Farmer's power to make, and that is, to  
 “ give one half of his Cattle Salt, and to the other  
 “ half none: by this simple trial, he says, in less  
 “ than a month the difference will be discernible;  
 “ the Cattle to whom the Salt is given will shew it  
 “ in their looks, in the sleekness of their coats, in

“ their growth, and in their strength and firmness  
 “ of labour. He adds, that with little more than  
 “ half their usual food, all these effects will be  
 “ produced: To establish his third proposition,  
 “ he appeals to the practice about Arles, where  
 “ the Cattle have as much Salt as they will eat,  
 “ and none are so healthy, or thrive so fast, as  
 “ those that eat most of it.”

“ To the above observations of our correspond-  
 “ ent,” adds Mr Young, “ we may state, that in  
 “ Spain, where the finest wool in the world is pro-  
 “ duced, great quantities of Salt are given to the  
 “ Sheep; to which they attribute, in a great mea-  
 “ sure, the fineness of the wool. The Salt is laid  
 “ upon the rocks, and the Sheep come and lick it,  
 “ and are exceedingly fond of it.”

But the use of Salt in husbandry is not confined  
 to France or Spain; all the kingdoms of the North  
 of Europe, the United States of America, our West  
 India possessions, the trading stations on the Coast  
 of Africa, all import largely from Great Britain;  
 and the Farmer, unrestrained in his operations,  
 finds a profit in the use of our Refined and Rock  
 Salt, with all the heavy expences attendant on  
 transporting it from this Country. The British  
 Agriculturist has the mortification to see himself

deprived of a valuable article, which nature so freely presents for his use. He not only witnesses his inability to resort to it, but at the same time sees it conveyed from his own distant Countries, where it affords to the Farmer the means of successfully opposing him, not only in *Foreign markets*, but often in his own.

That valuable branch of national industry, the Fisheries,\* would receive a stimulus which could be derived from no other source, and which, in the

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\* The following extract from a Tour in Scotland, by Dr. Garnett, late Professor of Natural Philosophy and Chemistry at the Royal Institution, forcibly illustrates the vast importance of the Fisheries, whilst we are at the same time made acquainted with the obstacles which prevent their extension, and which are all referred to the *baneful operations of the Salt Laws*. The Doctor says—"The Herring Fisheries in the Highlands and Isles, should be encouraged by every possible means; not only because it is an excellent nursery of seamen, but because it is the only way in which these barren Countries can acquire wealth and population. The poverty of the soil will prevent agricultural improvements beyond a certain and very limited extent, and the want of fuel, with the impossibility of raising any great quantity of provisions, will prevent the carrying on of manufactures on a very extensive scale; but the Fisheries are an inexhaustible fund of wealth, and can be carried to any extent whatever. This is the true source of wealth to these parts of the kingdom; and if attended to, as its import-

instance of the Repeal of the Salt Duty, would nearly double its present importance—a serious con-

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"ance calls for, will fill all the indented shores of North Britain with population, wealth, and every comfort and convenience of life."

On the difficulty of extending, and even, at present, carrying on the Fisheries, the Doctor states, that "In order to procure Salt for the purpose of curing Fish, those who want it are obliged to go for it a considerable distance, and at the Custom-house make oath, that the Salt which they purchase is for the curing of Herring only; they must, at the same time, give a bond, which is not discharged till they take the Herring, and what Salt may remain above the quantity allowed for a certain number, is returned to places distant 20 miles. Indeed, from many parts, they are obliged to go double that distance to a Custom-house for a few baskets of Salt, and return to the same Custom-house with the little Fish they have cured, or perhaps with the Salt, without any Fish at all. Besides, the people will never go to a distant Custom-house for Salt, till the Herring appear in the lochs, from the well-grounded fear that the fishing may fail, and that having no proper place in which to keep the Salt, it may in different ways be embezzled, and they incur all the penalties of the Salt Laws. Even when the Herring do appear, the weather may be bad, the distance of the Custom-house great, the Salt damaged in their open boats, and the Herring in a great measure disappear; or, at least, much valuable time is lost before they return home to their fishing. The lochs, which are often filled with Herring, and would be a source of wealth to the inhabitants, and afford employment to many who are obliged to seek it at a distance, are rendered of no use by the Salt Laws."

sideration for Government, and not lightly to be disregarded. This assertion may appear paradoxical, when it is known that the Fisheries are exempt from any duty; but I have the concurring testimony of the principal Fish-curers of the United Kingdom, that the penalties which guard the Duties on Salt operate as a prohibition to the extension of the Fisheries, to a most alarming degree. The vexations and losses arising from these causes are often intolerable: and it has not unfrequently happened that you, Sir, in your official capacity, have heard their just complaints, and lamented that the redress of them, and a due regard to the revenue, were incompatible. In the mean time, the operation of these restrictions occasions myriads of Fish to pass on to more favoured coasts, and prevents thousands of hardy Britons from engaging in a pursuit which would add wealth to the nation, afford great additional employment to the coasting trade, and largely increase the nursery of seamen for our fleets.

The Manufacturer of Glass, of Soap, of Earthenware, of White Leather, the Bleacher, the Chemist, &c. knows how to appropriate the Refined and the Rock Salt, these staple commodities of the empire, to numerous beneficial purposes; a very few only of which he now sparingly resorts

to; restricted on the one hand by the duty, and deterred on the other (even in the few instances where he is permitted to use it free from impost) by the impending vengeance of the Excise Laws, whose multiplied and ill-understood regulations are hedged round with penalties, which, however wisely calculated to protect the revenue, yet cannot fail to restrain and embarrass the Manufacturer.

The unrestricted use of Salt would enable our Manufacturers to dispense with foreign Alkalies; and the low price at which Soda could then be afforded, would give to our Merchants the opportunity of becoming exporters of this valuable material.\*

The least important benefit which the Country would reap from the Repeal of the Duty, is in itself of no inconsiderable consequence; inasmuch as it

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\* "A ton of Rock Salt contains about half a ton of mineral Alkali, which is for the most purposes far preferable to Pot Ashes."—*Watson's Chemical Essays*.

"Its decomposition, so as to separate the Soda, would not be difficult; and when this shall be effected, it would preclude the necessity of sending the wealth of the kingdom to Foreign countries for the purchase of mineral Alkali, would our Government allow us to take, without duty, that which nature offers so profusely for our acceptance."—*Parke's Chemical Essays*.

would vastly extend the manufacture of Salt, benefiting in its operations the trade in Iron, Coals, Bricks, &c. besides giving full employment to many thousand families, now sparingly engaged in the various branches of the Salt trade;\* and requiring, from its additional operations, the assistance of a very numerous body of artisans and labourers.

So great and so diffusive would be the advantages of such a measure, that it would soon be an error to assert that the Repeal of the Duty occasioned any loss to the revenue. The Agriculture, the Commerce, the Fisheries, the Manufactures of the empire, would, in a short period, by their increased benefits, indirectly compensate for the loss of the present Duty.

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\* The distressed condition of the labourers employed in the Cheshire Salt Works, was lately made known to his Majesty's Ministers. The want of employment was not, however, merely attributed to the general stagnation of trade, but in no inconsiderable degree to the permission which exists to import Foreign Salt. This measure is so glaringly impolitic, that nothing can be adduced, either in favour of its adoption or its continuance.—It deprives the British Manufacturer of a market for a very large quantity of his Salt; it diminishes the employment of our coasting vessels; and in serving as a cloak for the introduction of contraband goods, it occasions a serious loss to the revenue.

I have thus, Sir, briefly and imperfectly stated the advantages which Great Britain would derive from a *total Repeal of the Duty on Salt*; but imperfect as is the statement, I presume that it may suffice to awaken inquiry, and lead to a confirmation of the assertions which have been adduced.

The Minister who is sufficiently alive to this important measure, would confer the most essential services on his Country, by removing those impediments which now prevent it from reaping the various benefits which I have enumerated: he would enjoy the applauses and the blessings of a grateful people, and be enrolled among the best benefactors of his Country.

W. H.

*Liverpool,*  
*December, 1816.* }

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To the Right Hon<sup>ble</sup>  
The Earl of Glasgow  
Hawkehead  
Renfreeshire

31504

**END OF  
TITLE**